

## 'Restore the Delta' donors look to profit from status quo

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Those that oppose California's efforts to protect the Delta ecosystem and improve the reliability of the state's water supply through the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) have organized into a group calling themselves 'Restore the Delta,' whose name implies a desire to fix the ailing estuary. A [Sacramento Bee article](#) profiled the group and, in doing so, may have shed some much needed light on the real purpose of this advocacy group.

While the group maintains an image of being a representative of Delta family farmers and ordinary citizens, a large chunk of funding for its activities (including a recent film featuring narration by Ed Begley Jr.) is financed by local real estate moguls Alex Spanos and Fritz Grupe, and landowner Dino Cortopassi.

New home development and construction slowed in the Delta region with the recession, but there are plenty of future profits to be made by developers in the region. A recent report commissioned by the US Conference of Mayors found that the Stockton region's population will increase by over 50 percent in the next 30 years. That kind of population growth cannot be accommodated by the current supply of housing in the region and will necessitate more large-scale development in the coming years. Developers looking at long-term trends see plenty of money to be made in the Delta. But those profits will be harder to come by if new environmental restrictions make it more difficult to develop areas that provide habitat for at-risk species that are native to the Delta.

Researchers have pointed out that the loss of over 95 percent of the Delta's wetlands has been a key driver in the decline of the Delta ecosystem. [The Public Policy Institute of California](#) has recommended that further urban development in the Delta region should be prohibited in locations that are important for expanding floodplain habitats or that are particularly sensitive to urban runoff. Increased discharge of pollutants, including leaking automotive fluids and home and garden pesticides, which is a common consequence of expanding urban populations, can have significant adverse impacts on sensitive species and habitats in the Delta.



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The BDCP calls for large scale habitat restoration to improve the health of native Delta species. If certain conditions are met, the BDCP will be incorporated into the Delta

Stewardship Council's Delta Plan, which will also impose protections for the remaining acres of habitat in the Delta. Both of these programs are being developed to protect native species in the Delta and enhance the currently ailing ecosystem.

Restore the Delta has been a strong detractor of both of these plans. They may be waving the flag of environmental stewardship, but there are big green dollar signs hiding behind that façade. Successful restoration of the Delta through protection of habitat conflicts with the financial interests of the group's richest donors, who also happen to be at the top of the list of people who would pave the Delta over for profits.



# Delta Watch

**A Project of the Coalition for a Sustainable Delta**



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